

## **SOLDIER, STUDENT, FIRST RESPONDER, AND WRITER**

By John F. Hall

I was all of the above, in some years, at the same time. I became an enlisted soldier on June 29, 1962. After spending three years on active duty, in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, I



was placed in Control Group. I was subject to recall for three years. On June 28, 1968, I received an Honorable Discharge from the United States Army. I was given 15 retirement points for every year that I was in Control Group. In April of 1977, I enlisted in the Army Reserve, for one year at a time, in the 100<sup>th</sup> Training Division in Hopkinsville, KY. In April of 1979, I was given a Direct Commission in the Kentucky Army National Guard, as a First Lieutenant, in the 198<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion in Louisville, KY. At the request of the District Judge in Trigg

County, in 1980, I transferred back to the 100<sup>th</sup> Division and became the Executive Officer of D Company in Murray, KY. In 1981, at the request of the Kentucky National Guard Headquarters in Frankfort, KY, I transferred back to the National Guard and became the Executive Officer of the newly organized 614<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, in Murray, Ky. I was given the mission to relieve the Captain commander of that unit. He was denied tenure at Murray State University, and he was abusing his command authority. I assumed command of the 614<sup>th</sup> from 1982 to 1984. In 1985, I was assigned to the MP Team, 100<sup>th</sup> Maneuver Command, 100th Division, Louisville, KY. In 1990, I transferred to the 100<sup>th</sup> Division Headquarters as the Assistant G-3 Training Officer. From 1993 to 1999, I served as the Assistant Inspector General of the 100<sup>th</sup> Division. From June 1999 to December 1999, I served as the assistant S2/S3 of an Indianapolis Brigade of the 85<sup>th</sup> Division. From 2000 to 2003, I served as The Inspector General of the 85<sup>th</sup> Division in Arlington Heights, Illinois. From 2003 to 2005, I served as the Army Reserve advisor to the 198<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion, in an unpaid status, for retirement points only. My last paid, two-week annual training, was at Triple Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 2005. I served as the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) Assistant Provost Marshall.

I enrolled in my first night college course in 1963. My Army salary was \$75 a month. I could not afford a car, so I would take a Greyhound bus from Fort Campbell to Clarksville, Tennessee. I would walk several blocks from the bus station to the Austin Peay College campus. I must have been the dumbest student in the Literature class, because I was always the last student to finish the exams. I was lucky to have a compassionate professor. He knew that I was struggling. After the final exam, as usual, I was the last student to finish the test. As I was walking out the classroom door, the professor said: "John, don't give up!" I stopped and turn to him and said: "I won't!" I really believed that I had wasted my money and failed the course. To my surprise, He gave me a "C" for the course. I was also lucky to be the driver for a Colonel that worked in the 101st Airborne Division Headquarters. I would sit outside of his office in a desk-chair. He let me study my literature book. A few years ago, that World War II, wooden two story building was demolished. Only a grassy field remains where that building once

stood. It was not until the Fall Semester of 1966, that I enrolled in the newly opened Hopkinsville Community College (HCC) in Hopkinsville, Kentucky.

I married the former Paula Andree Oakley, of Golden Pond, Kentucky, on April 17, 1965. We were married at South Chapel, on the Tennessee side of Fort Campbell, by Army Chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel Riley. This was two and a half months before the end of my Army enlistment. We moved into her parent's house in Golden Pond. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was making everyone move out of the Land Between the Rivers, so they could make a National Recreational area that they called the Land Between the Lakes (LBL). The LBL managers were dishonest and mean. The people who did not want to sell out, were arrested and thrown in jail. One lady who was not wanting to accept the unfair value for her property, was called to meet an LBL manager in Cadiz. While she was at that meeting, other LBL managers had her house burned to the ground. A man who refused to deal with the LBL management, was arrested by U.S. Marshall's and transported to a jail in Louisville. He was incarcerated for six weeks with out bail. While he was in jail, his house, his barn, and everything that he owned, was burned to the ground. Then a TVA bulldozer buried what ever remained.

My father-in-law, Andrew C. Oakley had survived melanoma skin cancer, but he lost the use of his left arm. I was helping him salvage barn wood and barb wire fencing. His mother, Iva Lee Oakley sold her farm to the TVA. She purchased a farm located five miles west of Cadiz. Her two-story house in Golden Pond was too big to move. I used a hammer to knock the brick off Andrew's house. His house was trucked to the Cumberland River, put on a barge to cross the river, and trucked to his mother's new farm. When I was dating Paula, back in 1964, we made a visit to that farm. I took her picture standing on the porch of that old 1861 Dyer house. Miss Iva had only two rooms in that dilapidated old farm house renovated. The house had no indoor plumbing, except for a kitchen sink. She had a small bathroom installed off one of the renovated rooms. One day, I was salvaging barb wire on a fence row across the road from the Sunset Inn, in Golden Pond. It was a hot summer day. The Golden Pond Baptist Pastor was speeding down the gravel road, in front of where I was working, His car was stirring up limestone gravel dust and it covered the sides of the road, the trees, and just about everything in the fence row where I was working. I had on a hat and I used it to cover my face. The Preacher saw me and hit his brakes. His car slid sideways and finally came to a stop.

The Preacher backed up his car as the dust made everything look a pale shade of white. He rolled down his window and asked if I needed anything to drink. I thanked him and told him that I had a jug of lemonade. He asked if I knew what I was going to do and where I was going to live, once the TVA makes me move out of Golden Pond. I told him that I might try to get a job at the Hover plant in Cadiz, once my unemployment runs out. I said that Paula has a job working at Jennie Stuart Hospital in Hopkinsville, and we might find an apartment in Cadiz. I was helping Andrew with his cattle and mending the fences on his mother's new farm. The Preacher said: "They opened up a new community college in Hopkinsville, and Congress passed a new GI Bill. You might want to look into that." I told him that I would. The Preacher must have been in some kind of hurry,

because he stirred up more dust as he sped down the road. Paula had our car, so Andrew let me borrow his 442 Cutlass Oldsmobile, to drive to the college.

I drove to the Hopkinsville Community College (HCC) and talked to Dr. Brooks Major. He was the Dean of students. He told me that I could enroll under the new GI Bill. It would only pay for my tuition, books and fees. I told him that I needed to find a part time job, because Paula's job at the hospital did not pay much. Dr. Major told me that he heard about a new program that hired college students as part time Postal Assistants. He said that the Fort Campbell Post Office was hiring. When I married Paula, she was 18 and I was 19. We needed to buy a car. I had enough money for the down payment, but I was not considered to be an adult until I turned 21. Paula, at 18, was considered to be an adult, so she signed the contract to buy the used car. It was an Oldsmobile 98. It had air conditioning and electric windows, and it got decent fuel mileage. I drove to the Fort Campbell Post Office to take the postal test. Because I was an Army Veteran, I was given hiring preference, and I was hired.

My main job, at the Post Office, was to unload the large bags of mail that came into the Fort by a semi-truck trailer. The truck arrived at 5:00 AM. I would leave Golden Pond at 4:00 AM, drive thru Cadiz to Gracey, Kentucky, and then down Highway 117 to Fort Campbell, to unload the truck. After doing that, I would hand-sort the mail going to the many units on the Post. Parents would send cash to their soldiers. One of the Postal Assistants, working with me, began stealing the mail that contained the money. The parents complained to the Postal Inspectors, and they caught the student with the stolen mail in his pocket. That student went to jail. I worked until 8:30 AM, and then I drove to HCC for my first class at 9:00 AM. I was so tired, all the time, from unloading the mail truck, that taking notes became a problem. I purchased a tape recorder to record the professor's lectures. I would listen to them at night and make notes.

The Postal Assistant job did not pay enough money. I became the first student in Trigg County to take out student loans. I quit the Postal job, and went in search for any full time job that I could find. I had a friend named N.C Hooks. He was a labor foreman and he worked for the TVA in the LBL. The pay was the best paying job in the area. I asked N.C. if he could hire me to work in the LBL as a laborer. He told me that I would have to join the labor union in Paducah, so I drove to Paducah. Because I was an Army Veteran, I was given hiring preference, and I went to work, and N.C. Hooks was my foreman. I worked two summers in the LBL. I was considering dropping out of college for a semester, to work in the LBL. Word came down that the N.C. Hook's crew would be sent down to Tennessee to work. I had this feeling that I better continue my college studies, so I did not go with the crew. I went to work, part-time, at the Murray State, campus Post Office. I worked there for two years. I later learned that the man that took my place, on N.C Hook's crew was killed on the job, when a crane fell on him.

In 1977, I was a Kentucky State Trooper, taking night graduate courses at Murray State, and serving in the Army Reserve. I began writing my life stories that year. I also began corresponding with my spiritual mentor. But it was always Christ's grace that kept me from being killed, time after time.

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\*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

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